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ABSTRACT

The extent of standardization in the award of continuing education units (CEUs) in Kentucky was studied. A questionnaire was mailed to University of Kentucky program offices, the five regional universities and Kentucky State University, the University of Louisville, and the 13 community colleges. The response rate averaged 71 percent. Fifteen questions dealt with practices relevant to establishing and awarding CEUs at the institutions; another 15 questions related to attitudes regarding these practices. The only practices that seemed to be in effect at a majority of the campuses across the state were: requiring attendance for the award of CEUs; including classroom hours as the primary determinant of the number of CEUs to be awarded; and giving no grades for CEU activities. Most of the institutions responding were also similar in requiring the same basic information upon registration by participants for maintaining records for CEUs awarded. There were marked differences in other practices, including those related to costs, financial support, planning activities, receiving approval for CEU activities, awarding CEUs, awarding certificates, recordkeeping, and types of activities for which CEUs are awarded. Appended are data on CEUs awarded from 1974 through 1978 for each institution, and the study questionnaire. (SW)

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The Status of the Continuing Education Unit in Kentucky's Public Institutions of Higher Education

In 1968, partly in response to the post World War II boom in non-credit continuing education, a National Task Force was organized to develop a "uniform national standard of measurement" for such educational activities. An interim set of recommendations for a uniform continuing education unit was published in 1970, and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools adopted the CEU in its guidelines in 1971. By 1974 when the National Task Force published its full set of recommendations, the prognosis for the CEU looked good; it would be to non-credit education what the credit hour was to credit education, a recognized standard by which educational achievement could be measured.

Optimism and excitement pervade the early literature about the CEU. The chair of the National Task Force, William Turner, in 1973 commented that neither he nor his committee members had "ever expected such a general acceptance or adoption of the concept."[1] Dozens of articles were published detailing CEU policies and procedures. Among its advantages for higher education, the CEU was expected to

1. systematize and make uniform the collection and storage of quantitative data about continuing education
2. bring about the transferability of continuing education records for individual recipients
3. become a partial measure of faculty workload
4. serve as an accounting device to justify public fund support for continuing education
5. increase financial support for continuing education from business and professional societies
6. encourage lifelong personal and professional development

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7. improve the quality of continuing education because of criteria set by regional accrediting agencies
8. increase the quantity of higher education's contracts for non-credit education, and
9. improve the ability of higher education institutions to serve the continuing education needs of business and industry.

From the earliest days of the CEU, however, a potential conflict has been inherent in the concept. On the one hand, its proponents welcomed the CEU as a means of standardizing and bringing a measure of uniformity to continuing education. At the same time, there was a persistent call for flexibility in the design and application of CEU guidelines. The National Task Force guidelines specify that "variety is one of the recognized strengths of non-credit continuing education," and that the CEU "is designed to sustain that variety." Many of the terms used in the CEU definition are extremely open-ended--"an organized continuing education experience"--"under responsible sponsorship"--"capable direction"--and "qualified instruction." CEUs are to be awarded upon "satisfactory completion of the activity." "Proper program planning" will ensure program quality.[2] Throughout the CEU literature there is evident an attempt to hold in balance the goals of uniformity on the one hand and variety on the other. The uniformity seems necessary to ensure legitimacy - in matters such as funding, faculty workload, and credibility to user groups. Variety or flexibility is equally important, however, because a hallmark of continuing education is its ability to be responsive to the diverse needs of a wide range of consumer groups. The danger, of course, is that either the drive toward uniformity will end in undue restrictiveness, or the desire for flexibility will generate so much variation that standards and quality control will become meaningless.

The authors began this study in an attempt to determine what the value

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of the CEU has proved to be in one state, Kentucky, fourteen years after the National Task Force began its work. To what extent has the CEU remained flexible enough to accommodate diverse user group needs? To what extent has it, in fact, provided a standard measure of continuing education activities in Kentucky's public institutions of higher education? The authors were aware before they began the study, for example, that certain discrepancies exist among Kentucky's public institutions in terms of what kinds of activities are awarded CEUs. In some institutions leisure-time activities (sewing, cooking, etc.) carry CEUs; in others, CEUs are awarded only for courses related to professional development. A look at CEU figures reported to the Kentucky Council on Higher Education shows a rather surprising variance in numbers, suggesting wide variance in definitions of appropriate CEU activities and perhaps in reporting procedures. (See Appendix A.) Variance in procedural matters such as designing, administering, and keeping records for educational activities that carry CEUs is also evident. The question remains: Is there enough standardization to make the CEU meaningful, or has it become a pointless exercise in paper-pushing?

Certainly institutions in Kentucky seem to have moved away from expecting the CEU to be a measure of faculty workload or a justification for public fund support. Indeed, the 1981 Price-Waterhouse management report conducted by the Governor's Office expresses concern that continuing education per se might become a drain upon Kentucky's higher education resources and recommends that continuing education activities move toward self-sufficiency: the generation of their own support through tuition fees.

The Study

To determine the extent of the variations in procedures and attitudes related to the awarding of CEUs in Kentucky, a questionnaire was designed and mailed to directors and deans in twenty-six continuing education offices at

the University of Kentucky, the five regional universities and Kentucky State University, the University of Louisville, and the thirteen community colleges. The response rate averaged 71 per cent with 69 per cent of the community colleges, 62 per cent of the offices at the University of Kentucky and 100 per cent of the regional universities and Kentucky State University responding.

The questionnaire was divided into two sections: the first included fifteen questions which dealt with practices relevant to the establishing and awarding of CEUs at the institutions. The second section included fifteen questions related to attitudes regarding these practices. Although efforts were made to include in the questionnaire all responses generally associated with relevant practices, many of the completed questionnaires included additional comments and observations indicating unique procedures and attitudes at the various campuses.

A summary of the results of the survey is included in Appendix B. Perhaps the most striking aspect of the results is the marked variation in both practices and attitudes regarding the awarding of CEUs. The additional comments on completed questionnaires underscore this variety.

The only practices which seem to be in effect at a significant majority of the campuses across the state are 1) requiring attendance for the awarding of CEUs; 2) including classroom hours as the primary determinant of the number of CEUs to be awarded; and 3) giving no grades for CEU activities. Most of the institutions responding are also similar in requiring the same basic information upon registration by participants for the purposes of maintaining records for CEUs awarded:

1. name and address of organization
2. name of recipient
3. social security number
4. title of program

5. dates of program
6. number of CEUs
7. description of program
8. instructor
9. location
10. additional personal information about participant
11. format of program

There are marked differences in other practices - including those related to costs, financial support, planning activities, receiving approval for CEU activities, awarding CEUs, awarding certificates, record keeping, and types of activities for which CEUs are awarded.

Charges for awarding CEUs range from 0 to $45 per CEU. Obviously, in determining costs, some respondents considered aspects of programming other than those directly related to the reporting and recording of CEUs. Items such as transportation, space, equipment, and faculty salaries are viewed by some sponsors as costs of continuing education, but not as the cost of the units awarded; thus over 60 per cent of the respondents concluded their institutions do not charge for CEUs. Even those sponsors who reported a rather high cost per CEU could not accurately determine the full cost of a program since an institutional commitment to continuing education often involves planning and research and documentation carried on by a variety of offices on the campus, and some of the cost of the continuing education program may be hidden in budgets for offices other than that of continuing education. Institutions report varying degrees of financial support. More than half claim that their activities are self-supporting with the exception of administrative expenses which are funded by the university. Approximately one-fourth claim to be completely self-supporting and the others cover a variety of expenses with institutional funds. Although many institutions provide part of the funding

for non-credit activities, it should be emphasized that no state funds are directly allocated for non-credit, continuing education programs in Kentucky.

In the planning of activities, despite the Southern Association recommendation that representatives from the target audience be involved, approximately one-third of the institutions reported that activities are planned exclusively by one or more college or university personnel. The others tend to plan programs with input from both the advisory group and college or university staff. Final approval for CEU activities generally must come from the campus administration but any number from one to many administrators may be involved in this process.

CEUs are often awarded to all participants who meet the requirements regardless of whether the participant requests the CEUs. Apparently in many cases the number of CEUs awarded is as important to the institution making the award as it is to the participant receiving it. Certificates are similarly awarded as much upon the wishes of the institution as upon those of the participants. In cases where no certificate is available, participants can request a transcript or other indicator of the CEU awarded. Records maintained reflect similar variations in form; in most cases records are kept on transcripts (together with or separate from academic credit courses) but in some instances they are kept less formally. In at least one institution records are kept on index cards filed in the director's office.

In the second section of the survey similar discrepancies were detected; as there is considerable variation in practices, so there is variation in attitudes regarding these practices. Significant consensus among respondents was present on only a few items. Most respondents agree or strongly agree, for example, that CEUs are useful in demonstrating (1) maintenance or improvement of professional competence, (2) continuing qualifications for licensure, (3) certification, or registration, (4) evidence of personal and

vocational growth, and (5) planned efforts toward personal development. Most agree that there is a need for standard record maintenance, that target audiences should play significant roles in designing CEU activities, and that only accredited institutions of higher education should be allowed to award CEUs. Most disagree or strongly disagree with the assertions that the Kentucky Council on Higher Education should review and approve all programs for which CEUs are awarded at state institutions of higher education, that CEU records should be maintained at a national repository, and that permanent institutional records on individuals receiving CEUs are not necessary.

Responses varied widely, however, on most of the other items. There was no consensus about the need for more stringent guidelines. Similar disagreement was evident in response to the suggestion that CEUs should be awarded only for activities related to professional development. Approximately half of the respondents felt that CEUs should not be convertible to academic credit but the other half of the answers were divided between no opinion and agree or strongly agree that they should be convertible. Although most indicated there is some problem within the area of quality control of non-credit activities, there was no consensus regarding the seriousness of that problem. Over 75 per cent of the respondents felt there was a serious problem but less than half of these said they felt strongly about the seriousness of the problem.

Over half of the respondents were willing to recognize the marketplace as the only accrediting agency necessary for continuing education programs but other respondents were not convinced. Almost one-third had no opinion regarding the emphasis professional groups should place on professional competence versus mandated continuing education.

Surprisingly, there was no agreement on the issue of counting CEU enrollment as part of the institution's full-time equivalent count. Nor was there any agreement on the need to include an evaluation of student performance on CEU

records. A sense of wariness about the whole question of standardization is well summarized by the penciled-in notation of one of the respondents:

> The whole world of higher education has turned into a business that gives people a bunch of stuff they don't need in order to stay in business. Tie the CEU to accountability and reporting (checking up on Continuing Education offices by the Council on Higher Education), and offices will begin working toward quantity, headcounts, and various means to raise their numbers totally apart from enhancing the quality of service. Keep the eye on quality of services. Let individual college administrations monitor the productivity of the continuing education offices. Turning the CEU into a large complex reporting net converts it from a service to a requirement. People end up getting the CEU whether they want it or not because their getting it serves a need of the university to run up the numbers. That's not the way it's s'posed to be. To do it that way evidences just one more step in the rigidifying and entropic double-thinking that is currently creaming higher education's spirit and I fear reducing its potential. There is such a thing as "over-organizing" to no good end, and I see it happening with the CEU. Of course, if there is an elaborate reporting process, I want it to be standardized throughout the state. But I think the better idea is to let the CEU be something we do for professional people and individuals working toward self-improvement vocationally, a service of the universities and NOT some grand scheme to evaluate continuing education offices by shallow quantitative criteria.

This comment, the authors feel, reflects a concern mentioned in the introduction, that standardization will result in a loss of the flexibility that is essential to the CEU concept. The CEU seems to be the last bastion of freedom in the increasingly regulated world of public higher education.

Conclusions and Observations

The questionnaire has served the purpose of documenting current practices and attitudes within the area of Kentucky higher education's non-credit continuing education programs. It seems obvious that while there is some desire for established standards, there is even more reluctance to have any agency outside the institution establish controls for continuing education. Yet some measure of control and accountability typically goes hand in hand with state funding, and to resist this control may be to forego the benefits of direct state

funding and to rely extensively on tuition-generated support.

Contrary to early hopes, no state has yet been willing to incorporate CEU activity into its formula for allocating funds to higher education. The Kentucky Council on Higher Education has considered utilizing reports of CEUs awarded in determining budgets for the institutions, but as in all the other states which have considered this step, the Council has decided against it. Indeed, as previously noted, the Price-Waterhouse study of the management of Kentucky's public higher education resulted in the recommendation that state funds not be depleted by non-credit activities; that non-credit activities generate not only their own instructional costs but their administrative overhead as well. A similar recommendation came out of the Kentucky Council on Higher Education study known as The Prichard Report: "The cost of developing and providing continuing education should be recovered by fees charged to participants to make the programs self-supporting."[3]

Aside from the question of funding, the issue of quality control is a concern in and of itself. In 1977 the Council on Continuing Education Units was established to create further CEU guidelines and standards. Up to now, it has been an informational rather than a regulatory body, but there has recently been consideration given to using the CCEU to certify all organizations who award CEUs. At a 1981 invitational conference, those in attendance voted against investing the CCEU with certification powers but agreed that the time had come for more stringent quality controls. Among the recommendations considered, for example, was a more universal employment of some performance evaluation of CEU students. As one author comments, the only certain thing measured by the CEU at present is "the number of hours your fanny is strapped to a chair."[4] The CCEU is currently conducting a nation-wide survey of CEU practices as a first step toward considering measures for quality control.

If Kentucky's experience is at all typical, and the authors believe that

it is, there will be resistance to the idea of quality control monitored by an external agency. The view expressed by Cressner and Lord seems more acceptable to administrators of continuing education: "The sponsoring institution, organization, or agency has the ultimate responsibility to see that meaningful and representative program planning takes place, that competent resources are used for instruction, and that the program is of high academic quality."[5] If the responsibility for program quality remains in the hands of sponsoring agency, the final arbiter of that quality may well be user groups, in their recognition of the CEU as on index of learning.

The perception of CEU by user groups lies outside the scope of the present study. The current questionnaire results should, however, shed some light on how the CEU is administered and how it is perceived by administrators within Kentucky's public institutions of higher education. And the status of the CEU within higher education will in the long run affect its status among user groups. If these professional and business organizations see the CEU as useful for measuring and recording the accumulation of significant adult learning experiences, then ways should be found whereby the soundness of the instruction can be assured and its impact upon the learner can be measured and recorded.

APPENDIX A

CONTINUING EDUCATION UNITS

	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978
State-Supported Universities					
Eastern Kentucky University	362	233.6	891.45	4,514	8,286
Kentucky State University	350	486	486.0	1,363	1,025
Morehead State University		594.3	590.0	337	2,037
Murray State University	22.2	378	296.9	757	1,268
Northern Kentucky University		831.8			2,084
University of Kentucky	140,876	92,683.5	71,415.0	40,494	22,109
University of Louisville			5,598.0	10,350	11,042
Western Kentucky University	153.6	114.5	429.1	520	425
Community Colleges					
Ashland Community College	1,553	947.8	1,352.0	1,410	
Elizabethtown Community College	872	1,228.5	1,618.8	2,016	
Hazard Community College	37	940.5	1,287.4	724	
Henderson Community College	596	640.8	1,869.3	4,015	
Hopkinsville Community College	1,798	4,178.7	1,175.1	691	
Jefferson Community College	686	818.3	1,785.6	5,340	
Jefferson Community College - SW					
Lexington Technical Institute					
Madisonville Community College	92	57.2	32.0	319	
Maysville Community College	906	921.7	1,046.5	445	
Paducah Community College		589.2	1,732.8	2,438	
Prestonsburg Community College	1,282	1,752.4	1,852.8	1,626	
Somerset Community College	442	596.2	1,773.8	1,515	
Southeast Community College	343	461.9	267.4	439	
Senior Institutes					
Asbury College					
Bellarmine College				373	
Berea College					
Brescia College				9	
Campbellsville College					
Centre College					
Cumberland College			8.0		
Georgetown College					
Kentucky Christian College					
Kentucky Wesleyan College		299.2			10
Pikeville College			11.0	350	538
Spalding College	108.5		559.0	2,150	696
Thomas More College	1,395.4	1,351.9	2,536.6	2,160	
Transylvania University					372
Union College		25.0	47.0		212
Junior Institutions					
Alice Lloyd College		234	41.0	33	208
Lees Junior College	14			36	
Lindsey Wilson College	80			24	69
Midway College		9			
Southeastern Christian College					
Saint Catharine College					
Sue Bennett College			10.0		

APPENDIX B

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CONTINUING EDUCATION UNIT QUESTIONNAIRE

Your Institution: _____

Your Position at the Institution: _____

(The above information will be confidential and will be used only to aggregate data by type and size of institution. If, however, you wish to leave these items blank, feel free to do so.)

BESIDE EACH ITEM, PLACE THE LETTER OR LETTERS THAT BEST DESCRIBE PROCEDURES AT YOUR INSTITUTION.

____1. Each activity for which CEU's are awarded requires the approval of

7 A. faculty-administrative committee
17 B. one administrator
8 C. two or four administrators

____2. When determining the number of CEU's to be awarded, included are

34 A. classroom hours with direct participation of learner and lecturer or discussion leader
15 B. laboratory sessions
7 C. field trips
2 D. committee meeting time
4 E. time devoted to welcoming and making announcements
9 F. luncheon or dinner presentations

____3. The minimum requirement(s) for the awarding of CEU's include(s)

30 A. attendance
2 B. evidence of individual contribution to the program
5 C. evaluation of performance (such as written testing)

____4. Attendance records for participants are maintained by

19 A. the instructor
17 B. the director of the program (if different from the instructor)
2 C. no one

____5. At the completion of an activity

0 A. grades of A, B, C, D, F are awarded.
1 B. grades of S or F are awarded
32 C. no grades are awarded

___6. Charges per participant for awarding CEU's or registering and maintaining relevant records are

24 A. 0
0 B. $.50
1 C. $1.00
2 D. $2.00
1 E. $5.00
F. other $45.00 $3.00 $3.00

___7. Within an activity for which CEU's are awarded,

13 A. each participant is awarded the CEU upon meeting the requirements
15 B. Each participant may choose whether he or she wishes to receive the CEU upon completion of the activity
8 C. in some cases, each participant is awarded the CEU and in others, participants are allowed to choose whether to receive the CEU's

___8. Upon completion of an activity

19 A. a certificate is awarded to each participant as a matter of routine
11 B. no certificate is awarded but participants may request a transcript or other indication that CEU's have been awarded
6 C. a certificate is awarded to each participant only if the director of the activity specifically requests it

___9. CEU's are recorded

24 A. on a transcript separate from the regular academic credits
2 B. on a transcript with regular academic credit
8 C. on records not regarded as transcripts

___10. Permanent records indicating participation are maintained

15 A. by the Office on Continuing Education (or its equivalent on your campus)
26 B. by the campus Registrar
3 C. by an office other than Continuing Education or the Registrar

___11. CEU activities are planned and designed by

11 A. college or university personnel alone
19 B. college or university personnel aided by an advisory group with representatives from the CEU target audience
8 C. other (please specify) SEE BACK OF PAGE

12. Place a check by information included on records maintained for CEU activities:

32 (1) name and address of organization
34 (2) name of recipient
33 (3) social security number of the individual participant
34 (4) title of program
33 (5) dates of program
34 (6) number of CEU's awarded
29 (7) description of program giving some indication of content, level, objectives and format
11 (8) evaluation of individual performance
27 (9) instructors utilized in the activity
29 (10) location of the program (city or facility)
21 (11) cooperating organization -- company, agency, association or institution
24 (12) additional personal information about the participant (address, date of birth, educational background, employment status, program status, etc.)
27 (13) format of program (i.e., conference, seminar, institute, workshop, short course)

13. Place a check by each of the following for which your institution offers occupational improvement courses that carry CEU:

18 Business and Industry
14 Government
17 Education
12 Law and Law Enforcement
17 Clerical
14 Trades and Technologies
7 Agriculture and Food Production
15 Social Services
21 Health Services

14. Please check the following subject areas within which you offer courses that carry CEU's:

16 Leisure Time Activities
16 Cultural Enrichment
16 Finance
17 Foods and Nutrition
17 Family Living
15 Child Development
21 Health and Safety
19 Personal Assessment
16 Consumer Understanding
16 Civic and Economic Understanding

15. CEU activities at your institution are

7 A. supported in part by institutional funding
18 B. self supporting with the exception of administrative expenses
7 C. self supporting

11. Other:

(1) University personnel in confirmation with the instructor who is based on a single course contract
(2) Either A or an outside agent with our guidance
(3) Outside consultants
(4) A and B and outside instructors
(5) Both A and B
(6) Outside agencies with approval by university personnel

PLEASE CIRCLE THE NUMBER THAT DESCRIBES YOUR RESPONSE TO THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS.

	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
16. There should be more stringent guidelines for determining the type of educational experience for which CEU's are awarded.	1 8	2 4	3 5	4 11	5 6
17. CEU's should be awarded only for those education activities that are directed toward professional development.	1 8	2 6	3 6	4 6	5 7
18. CEU's are a useful record for demonstrating.					
A. Maintenance or improvement of professional competence.	1 0	2 2	3 5	4 10	5 17
B. Continuing qualifications for licensure, certification, or registration.	1 1	2 1	3 4	4 12	5 15
C. Evidence of personal and vocational growth and adjustment to meet changing career needs.	1 1	2 0	3 4	4 11	5 17
D. Preparation for a new career.	1 0	2 4	3 9	4 9	5 11
E. Planned efforts toward personal development.	1 0	2 2	3 5	4 13	5 13
19. Standard CEU record maintenance requirements are an essential component of a continuing education program.	1 2	2 0	3 5	4 9	5 18
20. Professional groups for whom continuing education activities are offered should play a significant role in designing the educational activity.	1 1	2 0	3 1	4 11	5 21
21. Some CEU's should be convertible to academic credit.	1 11	2 6	3 8	4 4	5 5

		Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
22.	There is a serious problem with quality control of non-credit educational activities.	1 2	2 6	3 10	4 6	5 10
23.	Only accredited institutions of higher education should be allowed to award CEU's.	1 1	2 3	3 8	4 10	5 12
24.	The marketplace, by recognizing only those programs which legitimately meet a continuing education need, serves as the only necessary "accrediting" agency for continuing education programs.	1 9	2 10	3 7	4 4	5 3
25.	Emphasis should be placed by professional groups on continuing professional competence rather than on mandated continuing education.	1 4	2 5	3 10	4 7	5 8
26.	The Kentucky Council on Higher Education should review and approve all programs for which CEU's are awarded at state institutions of higher education.	1 17	2 11	3 3	4 1	5 2
27.	CEU enrollment should serve as part of the full-time student equivalent count for the institution.	1 4	2 2	3 7	4 11	5 9
28.	CEU records should be maintained at a national repository rather than at individual campuses.	1 12	2 12	3 7	4 3	5 0
29.	The CEU record should include an evaluation of the student's performance.	1 5	2 10	3 8	4 6	5 5
30.	Permanent institutional records on individuals who have received CEU's are not necessary if each individual is given an official certificate of completion.	1 21	2 8	3 2	4 1	5 2

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NOTES

[1] College and University, Summer, 1973, p. 270.

[2] The Continuing Education Unit: Criteria and Guidelines. National University Extension Association, 1974, pp. 3, 17, 19.

[3] The Prichard Committee to the Kentucky Council on Higher Education, In Pursuit of Excellence (Frankfort: Council on Higher Education, 1981), p. 75.

[4] "Continuing Education Units: What Are They Really Worth?", Training Today (April, 1982), p. 7.

[5] Quentin H. Gessner and Charles B. Lord, "Criteria for the Use of the CEU" in The Continuing Education Unit: Concept, Issues, and Use (University of Georgia Center for Continuing Education, 1978), p. 35.